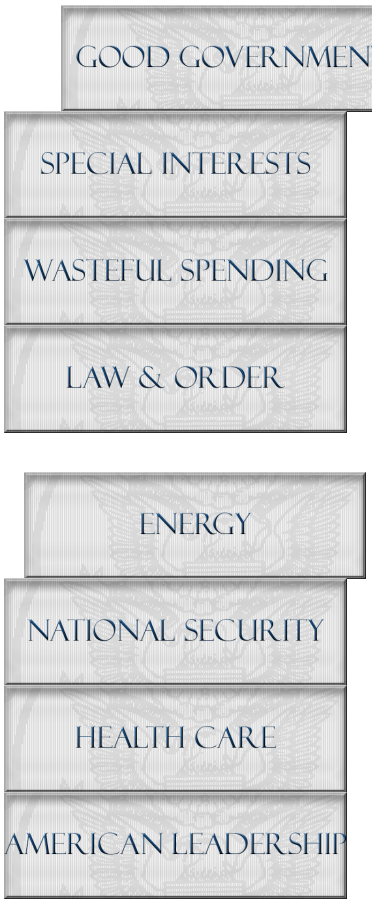

Featured:

Congressman Darrell Issa (R-CA) on Energy Debate's Missed Nuclear Opportunity

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Next month, global leaders will gather in Copenhagen to demonstrate their commitment to reducing carbon emissions and creating ecologically sustainable solutions to power our economy in the 21st century. Indeed, a moment has arrived when the world is looking to the United States to set the tone and serve as a model worthy of emulation – to be, as it were, a carbon-free city upon an ever-green hill.

That is, if we can keep the lights on.

America's economic strength was forged on the back of abundant, affordable, carbon-intensive energy. Reducing our dependence on fossil fuels is undoubtedly important but it will take patience, prudence, and most important- money. Carbon-free energy, in all forms, comes with a significant cost.

Congress has pursued a strategy of taxing fossil fuels in order to discourage their consumption and has heavily subsidized alternative energy sources like wind and solar in an effort to expand deployment of zero carbon energy sources. This strategy ignores an inconvenient truth - renewable energy cannot meet the nation's everyday power demands.

These resources must be developed but current technological, geographic and economic constraints limit their potential. The sad truth is that many of these resources are most abundant in remote regions, require massive amounts of land, and at present, generate variable and limited amounts of energy. In 2007, wind, geothermal and solar energy accounted for just a combined 2.5% of the nation's electricity generation.

The conspicuously missing link in the recent climate debate has been the most efficient and proven source of carbon-free energy – nuclear power. Any realistic climate change policy must include support for the only source of clean, dependable, and relatively inexpensive energy. In 2008, the 104 nuclear reactors operating in the United States produced more than 800 billion kilowatt-hours, equal to 19% of our total electricity output and representing nearly 75% of U.S. carbon-free electricity.

For 30 years, economic and social constraints sidelined the development of nuclear power in the United States. Today, social and economic shifts have placed the nuclear industry on the cusp of a renaissance. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is currently reviewing applications for 26 new reactors that would provide an additional 34,000 megawatts of electricity. Even as our economy struggles and job losses mount, nuclear energy remains a sign of hope, creating almost 15,000 jobs in the last three years as communities anticipate new plant development.

Yet clean, safe nuclear energy continues to stir fears that hearken to earlier times of environmental suspicion and political bias. In more than 50 years of operation, however, not a

single American has lost his or her life as a result of commercial nuclear power. Building on decades of experience, new reactor designs are more efficient, affordable and safe.

We have only scratched the surface of nuclear energy's potential. Advanced reactor designs could revolutionize the auto industry with hydrogen fuel cells, or close the fuel cycle completely- turning the earth's most volatile natural resources into electricity for millions. Yet it will take decades to completely close the fuel cycle- even longer if America continues to sit on the sidelines.

In the late 1970s, fears of global proliferation prompted the Carter administration to abandon domestic reprocessing. Regrettably, America still lags behind other nations that are already producing safe, clean nuclear technologies and developing new methods to secure and reprocess nuclear waste. The American solution for waste disposal – a proposed geologic repository at Yucca Mountain – appears destined never to open its doors. Such delays are the unfortunate result of decades of bad policy, which, if unchanged, will only widen the energy gap, hinder carbon goals, and weaken our energy security.

Still in its infancy, nuclear power is nonetheless a titan in the energy world. If the United States wants to fight the battle against carbon emissions and lead the global economy, we must build upon the innovation and entrepreneurial edge that nuclear technology has given us. Decisions today will reverberate for decades. It is time for us, as a nation, to reassert our commitment to this promising clean energy solution.

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Darrell Issa represents the 49th District of California in the U.S. House of Representatives. He is the Ranking Member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.